

## **South Vietnamese cuisine: a new potential in Finnish's culinary map**

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<p>This is a research-based thesis with the purpose of seeking for a potential future of a South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland, especially in the capital area where most young generations migrate. To reach this goal, this thesis consists of many steps from overviewing the world's demands based on a study about mega trends forecasted for the near future to the well-received trends in general and in food industry at large. To be more specific, the author will explore recent food trends globally and in Finland, included together with the existence of Vietnamese cuisine in Finland.</p> <p>The next step is to provide the background of the Vietnamese cuisine to help understand why it can be a potential for the Finnish gastronomy market, in contrast to other Asian flavours available in Finland. Facts about the cuisine's history and multicultural impact are also mentioned. From forming the theoretical framework to forecasting the potential of the discussed topic, there are two research methodologies used for evaluation and further study. The first one is a quantitative research study by conducting an online survey to gather various responses from people with different backgrounds and demographic values. The second research method is benchmarking Vietnamese cuisine against other existing competitors within the Nordic areas who share similar cultural aspects.</p> <p>Most findings from the survey shows a general lack of knowledge regarding Vietnamese cuisine from respondents' suggestions and expectations, the South Vietnamese kitchen is still a promising idea if it can address the concerns mentioned from the survey participants. In addition, the proposed design, pricing, dining habits are also collected from the survey results.</p> <p>Based on the study of relevant topics and the research's results, a preliminary plan is introduced for a modern South Vietnamese kitchen with proper prices while providing delicious Vietnamese food with a warm, cosy atmosphere, with options for specialties and the idea of food sharing is relatively new but worth a try.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> South Vietnamese, cuisine, trends, food culture, Finland.	

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# 1 Introduction

Anthony Bourdain- former chef, cookbook author and word traveller who inspired many fellows in exploring the culinary used to say, quote “Food is everything we are. It’s an extension of nationalist feeling, ethnic feeling, your personal history, your province, your region, your tribe, your grandma. It’s inseparable from those from the get-go.” (Colony 2015). Growing up in Saigon, the city which affords energy and radical vitality to its residents, the author is intimated to not only the city’s urban atmosphere but the image of street food on every corner and in the hearts and minds of all the Vietnamese-born citizens. Sometimes, those values can only be appreciated when you don’t have a chance to enjoy them on a frequent basis. As for the author, food became a struggle after she moved from Vietnam to Finland. Acclimating to oatmeal, rice pie, sausage etc. was endurable, but tough. The strange language, the new people, the hard weather, even the homesick could easily drive any Vietnamese in Finland to seek for their comfort food. Some people need to fulfil their hunger while other tried to find ways to feel closer to home.

This thesis is inspired not only by the author’s nostalgia but also by a long period working in the hospitality industry and observing how rapidly the Finnish gastronomy world has evolved. People have generally stopped asking naive questions such as “where is Vietnam?” to “how does Vietnamese food taste? Is it the same as Chinese or Thai?” to “I love it, where can I try it?” and “We should have more”. More and more Finnish people are taking a winter holidays on quiet, peaceful Vietnamese islands or challenge themselves by spending days in large bustling cities. They are keen to take on new adventures to satisfy their hunger for experiences. These trends can be seen in throughout Finland. Many restaurants have stopped suggesting dressing code for diners. A well-suited gentleman can be sat next to a woman in casual wear. Menus have become more flexible and informative, adding notes such as “Vegetarian, vegan options are available” or “Please ask our staff for specials”. These changes to restaurant culture allow people to feel at ease when examining a new style of cuisine and focus more on relaxation and the gratification of a new dining experience.

With the growing number of Vietnamese students in Finland, changes in dining habits as well as upcoming trends in various fields, there appears to be a bright future for Vietnamese cuisine. As the author originates from South Vietnam, the necessity of a South Vietnamese inspired kitchen is strongly proposed.

## **1.1 Aim of the thesis**

The thesis's topic has been built up since the first year in Haaga Helia university. Although the idea was slightly changed a few times, however, as the author had enormous passion with restaurant industry and aim to establish one in Finland, the intention to conduct a research for the topic is necessary. From creating the idea to actually bringing it to life, requires careful evaluation and observation. The thesis process took approximately two months to complete, from mid-September 2017 to mid-November 2017. It is essential to learn if the cuisine would fit the Finnish market or not, and how far could it go and survive in Finland. Therefore, the author plans to conduct this thesis as a research tool, to see if it has a place in Finland's growing culinary landscape.

The thesis focuses on learning about the food trends in Finland, mainly in the capital area of Helsinki and the possibility to fit the Vietnamese cuisine. The populous of the capital region is growing each day, and they have the great need for new dining experiences to share with friends and families. There are four main points to be discussed here: the culture of Vietnamese cuisine, the modern food trends, the existence of the cuisine in Finland and the perceived image of a potential South Vietnamese kitchen; all of which will be based on the collected data. The author uses two research methodologies to reach the goal. The first one is the benchmarking method by studying the Vietnamese restaurants have been established between Finland and other Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway and Denmark). Although there are only a few such establishments in Finland so far, these restaurants will be compared with the existing ones in the Scandinavian market, namely Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The second method is quantitative method, that used to continue the study by conducting a survey where customers' expectations and experiences will be viewed and analysed in a broader aspect.

## **1.2 Research questions**

There are two primary arguments the author hopes to find the answers when planning for the research questions:

- 1) What are the current food trends in Finland?
- 2) Where is Vietnamese cuisine in the gastronomy map in Finland and its future?

In addition, the author hopes to seek the clues for a few more issues. We can clearly spot Thai, Chinese and Nepalese restaurant in Finland as they are so popular, yet it is impossible to have some Vietnamese flavours. Moreover, there are some hints of the Vietnamese cuisine in Finland recently, yet it is still quite blur for the customers to recognize. Based on

the research and study about the modern food trends in general and in Finland specifically, the author wants to see that what are the demand of customers and if Vietnamese cuisine does have a potential to endure, in what form should it be created to meet the current needs of the market? This is also the key question needed to be answered from this thesis.

### **1.3 Thesis outline content**

The thesis begins by introducing the goal of the thesis's topic, how the author forms the idea and how relevant it is to the author's study path. In addition, the two main research questions are acquainted for the readers to get a broader view of the thesis topic. Moreover, additional research questions are added to support the main discussed issues.

The following chapters contain the findings of the theoretical framework from megatrends to trends. Because the topic is related to the culinary field, general food trends are examined along with a specific focus on Finland. To understand if a new ethnic culinary culture fits into the Finnish culture or not, the Vietnamese cuisine chapter is involved as the fourth chapter to give the readers a broader and clearer view about the cuisine's background and what potential it might have in Finland.

The fifth chapter starts with the introduction of the research development method used in the thesis, which includes the quantitative research method and benchmarking comparison. A preliminary outline of a potential South Vietnamese kitchen is drawn based on the collected recommendations and comments from the respondents and further suggestions based on the author's experiences and expectations. The appendices include the highlight of Vietnamese dishes, the spices' map, benchmarking table as well as survey's contents.

## **2 Megatrends, Trends and Fads**

In this chapter, we discuss megatrends, trends and fads, from understanding what they are to how we can notice and locate them as well as and how important they are with our modern life in a general aspect. The chapter includes careful studies from reliable organizations that have strong experiences in various industries as well as experts' forecasts.

### **2.1 Megatrends**

Megatrends are defined as “macroeconomic and geostrategic that shape the world”. They are not a relatively new concept and can be called in different names based on various governments, companies and organizations. They have an enormous impact not only on business but also on society, culture, economy and even personal lives. It embraces our future and any changes that come along with it. (PWC 2016, 1.)

Many organizations have recently released their reports about megatrends' forecast. The Hay group presents the six core megatrends which can be demonstrated until 2030:

- Globalization 2.0
- Environmental crisis
- Individualism
- Digitization
- Demographic change
- Technological convergence

(Hay Group 2014)

The PWC also shared their list, which included:

- Shift in global economic power
- Demographic shifts
- Accelerating urbanization
- Rise of technology
- Climate change and resource scarcity

(PWC 2016)

Most of the megatrends are similar between the two lists. They view Asia as a rising economic power. The upper class is growing as is global trade emanating from the region. (Hay Group 2014, 5). PWC claims that while the global market growth rate is slowly decreasing, the economies of the Asia-Pacific region (excluding Japan) continue to develop, resulting in higher GDP's and global influence (PWC 2016, 4).

Both corporations share the same concern towards demographic change. In many parts of the world, the young population is growing rapidly, meanwhile in some areas this growth applies to the elderly population. This dissimilarity strongly effects social benefits, work forces, taxes and so on. (PWC 2016, 9.) This issue is also brought up by the Business Insider Nordic magazine. With the world's expected population to reach 8.3 billion by 2050, there is a huge gap between generations as well as an imbalance in the number of residents between large urban cities and rural areas (Weller 2017).

Furthermore, with the rise of connected technology, people are required to be more open-minded to the latest digital innovations which not only assist us in our daily lives but also supports the global economy (Hay Group 2014). This fact is echoed by the Global Head of HP- Andrew Bolwell in the company spring journal, where he shows his confidence in the power of innovation's acceleration (Bolwell 2016).

## **2.2 Trends**

Trend is defined differently under different subjects. For the statistician, it is the direction of curve; the sociologist understands trend as the prediction of something which is going to happen, and can be approved by the average person, or trend can even be explained as the progressive changes that (sometimes) occur from product development and (sometimes) new products are the result. Trend can be a new type of car, a new style of clothes, a new modern furniture. How you acknowledge the definition of trend depends on the flow you are focusing on. (Vejlgaard 2008, 8.)

There are six attitudes which reflect how a trend can fit into society and the life of a trend. It is described as a pattern or can be shown as a graphic model called the Diamond-Shaped Trend Model.



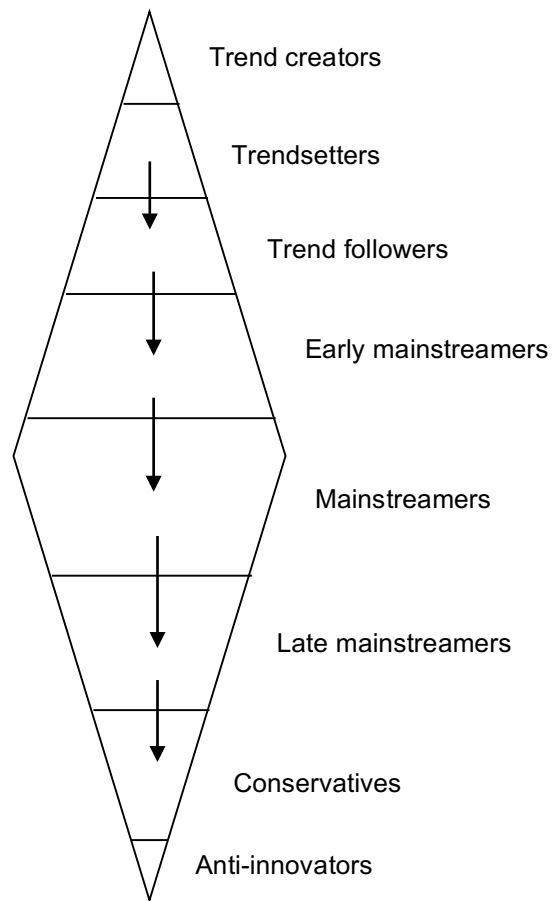


Figure 1. The Diamond-Shaped Trend Model (Vejlgaard 2008)

This pattern includes six element keys:

- Trend creators.
- Trend setters.
- Trend followers.
- Early mainstreamers.
- Mainstreamers.
- Late mainstreamers.
- Conservatives.
- Anti-innovators.

There is another simpler approach towards trend's definition. It is explained as a new behaviour or attitude, even opinion and expectation. All trends are controlled by three essential values: Basic needs, Drivers of change and Innovation. People are all human beings who have their own needs, wants and desires. These values drive them to seek for something new and exciting to fulfil their emotions and passions. Trends cannot be created

without change and innovation. A start-up, a new product, a new service can all become the cause of the existence of trends. (Mason, Mattin, Luthy & Dumitrescu 2015, 46.)

So, the question is, how can trends be spotted? Vejlggaard suggests in his study that people should follow and carefully observe what trend creators and trendsetters to see where they lay their eyes and concentration on ((Vejlggaard 2008, 40–71). There are also websites which people can check to see what the current trends are in the modern days such as Trend Spotter, PFSK, Ted, The Coolist etc. These channels provide pictures, videos and even instructions for those people who are interested in building up a trend. (Maina 2017.)

There is one certain thing: technology is the main tool in spreading a trend or forecasting the upcoming trends. People no longer depend on face-to-face communication, instead, they exchange knowledge and information through various networks and it boosts the trend process much faster. People nowadays have the ability to travel more and in contact with various cultures to adopt latest ideas faster while media helps to accelerate the process of becoming a trend. (Vejlggaard 2008, 148–162.)

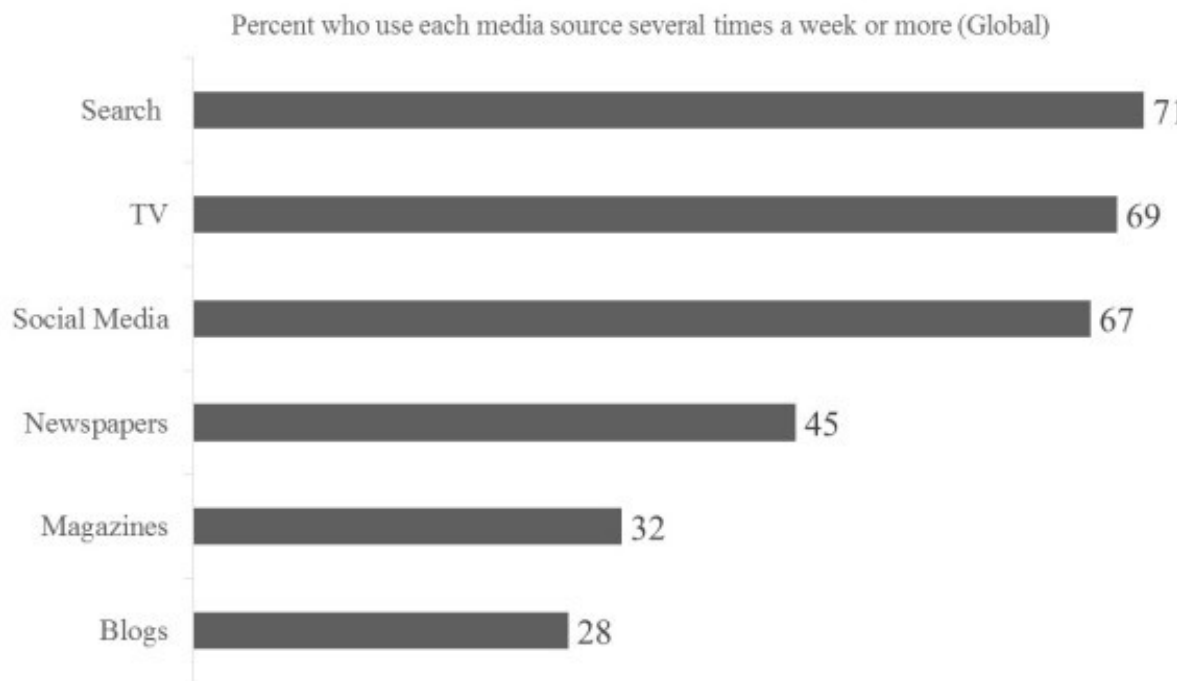


Figure 2. Percent who use media source several times a week or more (Global) (Trippenbach 2016)

The number of people who use blogs, printed newspapers and magazines is quite lower than the other channels such as social media, TV and search engines according to Figure 2. People can easily see what others think and discuss towards a specific topic. Search engines do not specifically create any content but they can quickly link users to various sites which provide same or similar ideas. (Trippenbach 2016.)

### **2.3 Fads**

Vejlgaard states that not everything that trend creators and trendsetters put their eyes on will become a trend. Some can turn to a fad, or even a ripple. There are many reasons to explain the failure of the new style or innovations. Firstly, there are so many products that trendsetters cannot digest all of them. Secondly, there are few trends that are too uncomfortable for the average, so it cannot target a specific market. Thirdly, not all styles are approved; some are accepted in this culture but can be illegal in others. Finally, not all new styles are affordable for everyone. They can be overpriced even for the wealthy consumers; therefore, it cannot transform into a trend. (Vejlgaard 2008, 148.)

Verifying a trend and a fad might take some time because they can easily be misunderstood. Trend is what we do and how we do it will determine whether it becomes a trend or a fad (Mason et al. 2015, 55). In 2016, People magazine published a list of the year's biggest fads, these included Facebook reactions, Snapchat filters, Pokémon Go among others. They are only fads because they may grip people for a short time, but they lack the potential of trends to survive in the long run (Baylis & Mazziotta 2016).

### **3 Trends in food culture**

The definition of food has no longer meant as merely a means of survival, but it has become a source of comfort. Many people find that by exploring different cuisines, they would be brought closer to understanding those specific cultures. People who live in Finland start to talk about the new Mexican restaurants while people in Vietnam start to learn about the new Cambodian bistro just opened in town. Frequent habits turn to favourite trends. And for that reason, this chapter is built to discover what are the most recent trends related to food culture in general and, specifically, within Finland. What are people's favourite food and beverages, their food preferences and any potential products related to the topic will all be discussed in this chapter.

#### **3.1 Recent changes in global food trend**

To understand how much food trends have changed rapidly during the last few years, the author uses quite aged material to the most recent ones to understand what drive the world's food consumption to its modern stage.

In the studying called "Food consumption and drivers", Kearney states that "Changes in agricultural practice over the past 50 years have increased the world's capacity to provide food for its people through increases in productivity, greater diversity of foods and less seasonal dependence". He uses several data sources to examine both supply and consumption patterns, which include Food balance sheets, Household budget surveys and individual dietary surveys for exploring food consumption trends and the forecast up to 2050. The results show as the sum of intake calories per day has been increasing rapidly throughout a few decades. (Kearney 2010.)

In addition, there are a few differences between developing countries and industrial countries. There are two main stages which reflect a pattern affects the dietary change process. The first stage (the expansion effect) means the increasing in energy supplies, where extra calories come from lower price food products which made from vegetables. This appears in both developed and developing countries. The second stage (the substitution effect) form a shift which shows almost no critical change in food consumption generally. It mostly depends on specific countries, belief, culture and religion where specific substitutional products are consumed, depend on various purposes. (Kearney 2010.)

Food consumption is influenced by several elements, such as:

- Income.
- Urbanization.
- Trade liberalization.

- Transnational food corporations (franchises and manufactures).
- Retailing.
- Food industry marketing.
- Consumer attitudes and behaviours.

(Kearney 2010)

Rise in income reflects change of consumers' lifestyles where they can have better diets and healthcare while limiting the risk of obesity, diseases and morbidity. It results in the behavioural change toward health-driven, giving people chances to take control over their life and social contribution. (Kearney 2010.)

These facts are based on Kearney's findings of the globally living situation up to 2010. However, as trends change from time to time and their existence vary from one place to another, many popular organizations, experts and social media channels are no longer wasting their time looking at the past but move forward to the future by analysing the market needs and demands or different tools, in order to forecast and frequently update for their readers what they believe are the newest, most well-liked trends (Seto 2017).

Swaine published her findings in Travel Industry Today the list of global modern food trends, which she believed that have been spread rapidly from one country to another. Many of these trends can be seen easily in our social life, such as food festivals, healthy meals guide, culinary experience tour packages, food Instagram application etc. Not only do people pay more attention what they have for a meal but also an approach dining as a leisure activity. (Swaine 2017.)

Moreover, there are six trends which believed can change the food industry we have now, in which many have left their traces in many most urbanized areas:

1. The art of dining is creating theatre.
2. Food and technology.
3. Digitalised dining.
4. The rise of the aspiring gourmand.
5. Pop-up restaurants keep popping up.
6. Diverse consumers.

(Cada Design 2017)

### **3.2 Food trends' recent developments in Finland**

Finnish culinary culture boasts simple natural flavours which each season holds its own value. Braised root vegetables and meat casseroles are preferable dishes during the cold winter months. Rhubarbs and nettles are early spring's options while summer is all about

new potatoes, asparagus and berries. Late summer and autumn are favourite time for people who love hiking and mushroom picking. Wild game and fresh fish can be easily found in various time of the year. Finnish flavours are generally natural, healthy and authentic. (This is Finland 2008.)

Recently, Finland witnesses many changes in their culinary world. Although old favourite ingredients are kept, there have been enormous changes in the traditional dishes, not only by the flavour but also the cooking methods as well as presentation. People are more interested in organic products, wild herbs as well as sustainable food chain. A modern Finnish dish may be compared as a symphony, in which each of the ingredient can even tell its own story, from the fresh pickled chanterelles to Finnish lavaret, lingonberries, reindeer meat with cranberry sauce. Everything that a true Finnish person loves all come from nature. (This is Finland 2008.)

This is just the preliminary forecast for the initiation of Finnish modern food trend. In early 2016, a young Finnish chef named Joona Lehto summarized in his article about what he believed would be the modest trends in Finnish culinary, which included:

- Food delivery to home: with Wolt, Foodora services from various restaurants to customers' home door.
- Private chefs: professional chefs who can plan the menu, providing cooking lessons as required.
- Vegetables: vegetarian dishes will be more popular in most of restaurants' menus. People who cannot handle meat and fish will have more options for dining.
- Transformation of restaurants: more bistro style restaurants which offer not only good food but also cosy, relaxing atmosphere.
- More ethnic flavours: the rise of various ethnic groups was easily spotted in Finland, especially Mexican cuisine as well as Japanese etc.

(Lehto 2016)

Another forecast about Finnish food trends was released in late 2016 by the Kesko Group. After a period of careful observation and studying, with the assistance of experts, retailers, suppliers and also customers, they have conducted with the list of what they have faith in becoming the promising food trends in Finland in the near future:

- Informed consumption: food waste will be reduced while local food and ethnic food is on the rise.
- Ready quickly: a trend which make consumers' life much easier with food ideas or make it quicker for shopping time by the organization of the products in stores.

- Everyday well-being: people have more desires in eating healthily with precise diets while still enjoying the meals.
- Tailored well-being: more people will favour certain diets to boost a healthy lifestyle. Belong to this group are gluten-free diets or organic products only in the consumers' shopping baskets.
- Fine-tuned food: restaurant-standard food is preferred at home and people pay close attention on the products they purchase from stores. Fresh ingredients are better options rather than ready-made packages.
- Culinary adventures: many cooking classes are organized for people who share the same interest, as well as international food attracts more consumers who want to seek for experiences.

(K-Ruoka 2016)

### 3.3 Vietnamese cuisine's existence in Finland

Comparing to other European countries such as Germany, Czech Republic, France etc. the number of Vietnamese in Finland is shown as below:

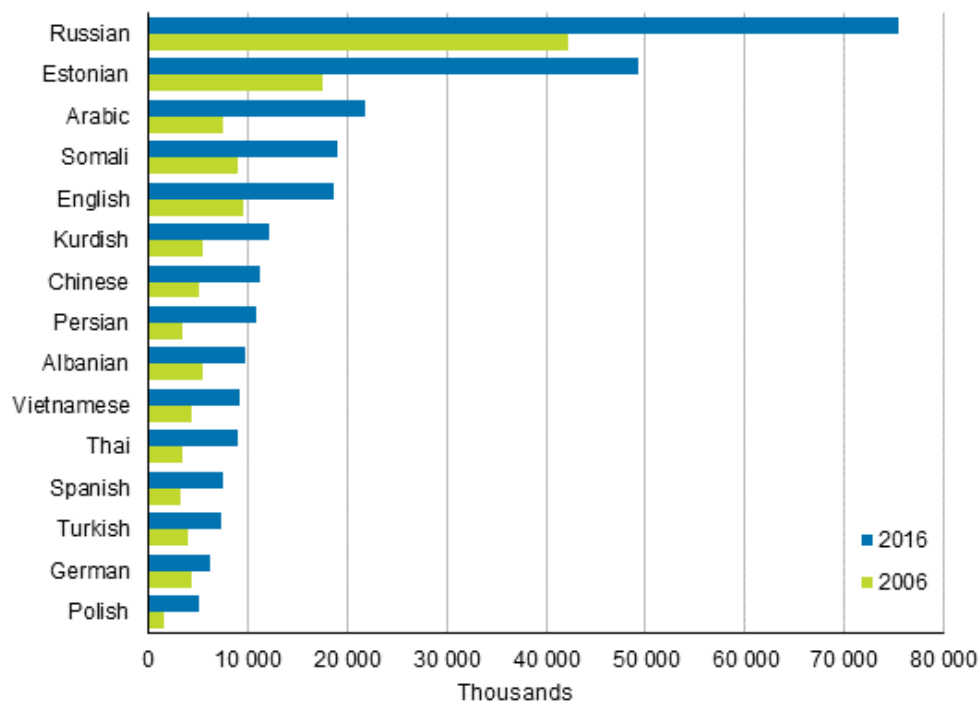


Figure 3. The largest groups by native language in Finland between 2006 and 2016 (Statistic Finland 2016)

It was claimed that many of the first Vietnamese fled from the countries first time in 1979, so called “boat people” to Finland, while the second group with more than a hundred refugees arrived four years later in 1983 to avoid the destruction of the war (Siirtolaisinstituutti 2003, 8). From approximately 200 Vietnamese by 1983, the number has increased rapidly by 2016 close to 10000, according to Figure 3. The author has had a chance to meet and

work with those claimed to be the first Vietnamese migrants who said that they struggled with learning the language, cultural adaptation and even the weather, which were understandable. Many of them had no choice but to choose secondary labour market jobs to support themselves and the families (Siirtolaisinstituutti 2003, 10). It was unsure when discussed, but many of them after arriving to Finland had tried to move to further south Europe because the Vietnamese communities there were much bigger, therefore it was easier to survive and get used to a new life there.

The first Vietnamese restaurant in Finland was opened in 1992, named Tre Viet and located in Itäkeskus shopping centre (Paljakka 2014). As a matter of fact, they served North Vietnamese food, because of their origin. The author had a chance to visit this restaurant in 2010, at that time there were some hints of South Vietnamese cuisine in their menu such as summer roll, Spicy beef shake, however, the similarity which the author found by visiting this restaurant was the name of the dishes, not the ingredients, let alone the flavour.



## **4 Vietnamese cuisine**

Vietnamese cuisine is not entirely the same as Chinese cuisine as many people claim. In fact, it is an orchestra built by comprehending many multicultural compositions. The North Vietnam is strongly affected by Chinese culture while the South is considered as a clone of France, whether many French culinary values are still kept up to day. The Central is a mixed between the other two regions with a small twist of royal ethic back from the old days. In addition, the South is also inspired by the Spanish and ancient Cambodia culture, which can be spotted in many rural areas. (Tim Hieu Viet Nam 2017.) A typical day can be started with rice porridge or noodle soup in many Northern families as the same in China or just a quick baguette and a cup of coffee like a usual morning in Paris, preferably outside in the South, all can be co-existed in every day's life of Vietnamese locals (Doan 2012). Why a small country such as Vietnam can carry many cultural values as mentioned will be all discussed in this chapter. Due to lack of available materials related to the history, this chapter must work with quite a few aged sources of materials but still reliable to provide a broad image of the cuisine generally.

### **4.1 The cuisine's background**

Vietnam is briefly divided into three principal areas: The Northern, the Central and the Southern of Vietnam. Each part is affected by various kinds of weather conditions and influences of three major colonist groups: ancient Chinese in the north, Indian in the west and French, Spanish in the south. Each area's cuisine had its own story of changes and developments throughout the time being. France was the latest yet strongest and had the most influence on the country. By 1883, the French had expanded their empire to the further south and west, founding the French Indochina which included Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. (Civitello 2011, 283.)

However, long before the French colonist came to Vietnam, there was one French man who had already made his appearance, carrying a large mission on his shoulders, that person was Alexandre de Rhodes - a French Jesuit missionary in 1640. In fact, he was the first one to write the Vietnamese -Latin-Portuguese dictionary, the root of Quoc Ngu-our official language nowadays. (Huynh & Bao 2014.) His work was continued and succeeded 121 years later by another Roman Catholic missionary Pierre-Joseph-Georges Pigneau de Béhaine, who even made his way to become the assistant of the strong, ambitious king at that time- Nguyen Anh in his large invasion toward the south. (Huynh & Bao 2014.)

China and its culture had significant impacts on Vietnamese lifestyles and food culture, linked to the fact that Vietnam had been ruled by China for almost a century (Local Food

Tour 2017). Their imprints on the country are still apparent today, which can be seen not only in the ingredients and cooking methods but also the developments of dikes and canals to have the control over floods and as farmers' assistance, as well as various religions such as Taoism, Mahayana Buddhism and Confucianism were brought in (McWilliams 2010, 299).

In addition, the Chinese yin and yang philosophy also affects the Vietnamese daily life (Kittler, Sucher & Nelms 2012, 358). This philosophy taught people that the balance should always be kept, especially through diets and special treatments to gain and maintain health. While yin represents feminine, dark, north, water, earth etc., yang stands for masculine, light, south, sun, fire etc. and they must meet each other within acceptable limit. (Cartwright 2012.)

Many ancient Vietnamese followed these rules specifically and the author believes it still convinces many modern Vietnamese because she still hears people talk, discuss and follow it day to day in Vietnam, as it is this rule that cannot ever be broken if one wants no harm to himself. Chinese cuisine affected mostly in the North, which we can see in ingredients selection, cooking techniques, which include of the wok, chopsticks and fried, stir-fried dishes (Asian Inspirations 2017). This can be explained by the invasion and migration of ethnic Chinese before 900CE (McWilliams 2010, 299).

In contrast of the North, the Southern Vietnam used to belong to Champa dynasty (Cambodia nowadays). The invasion towards the South had been done slowly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until 18<sup>th</sup> before the French colonist took the control. The area was covered with forest, mud and had no sign of life. The Nguyen dynasty- the last royal kingdom of Vietnam, was urgent to settle and build up a new kingdom for his people who were willing to flee their homes with him, among them were many of the 3000 ethnic Chinese who ran away from their country to seek for a better place to live. (Bien Phong Viet Nam 2011.)

When the heat of the invasion was cooled off, though peace would finally come to the country, then came the French with their army and civilization, which turned Vietnam into a whole new path, in which the Indians and Portuguese started to leave their influences on many elements such as religions and food culture, with the use of curries, coconut milk, Chilean peppers and herbs such as cilantro, lemongrass, mints, basil. (Civitello 2011, 283).

The French had the strongest affection toward the South both mentally and physically. Architectural landmarks, opera houses, schools, roads were all built by the French in Vietnam. Children who went to school had to learn French as their first language and people

would use French slangs on a daily basis and only stopped around 1954 when the French colonist came to an end (Whitney 1997). More importantly, the French brought in many core values of Vietnamese cuisine nowadays: baguettes, pate, beefsteaks, condensed milk, flan, custard tarts and many other ingredients such as potatoes, onions, jambon, asparagus (or Western bamboo shoot) as well as French delicacies. In addition, the habit of drinking coffee shows the strong French influence, the coffee was quickly adapted into the country and turned Vietnam into a strong land for growing coffee thanks to the climate. While coffee was served hot in France, it was preferable to drink coffee cold in Vietnam. (Monaco 2015.) Up to day, Vietnamese still have the habit of using old French slangs to describe a few food options: gatô for gâteau (cake), ga for gare (station), sup for soupe (soup) etc. (Just landed).

Many people may misunderstand Vietnamese language and cuisine to other neighbours such as China, Japan, Thailand etc. However, it may come as a surprise that Vietnam has an international cuisine culture, depending on each area. (Nguyen 2016.) As a matter of fact, Vietnamese cuisine is considered as one of the healthiest cuisines in the world, with “the heavy reliance on rice, wheat and legumes, abundance of fresh herbs and vegetables, minimal use of oil, and treatment of meat as a condiment rather than a main course” (Royal Heritage Cruise).

Ancient Vietnamese depended much their lives on rivers, as they provided water for both rice/wheat field and a large source for fish and seafood. There are two main rivers, the first one is the Red Delta which runs from the furthest north to near Hue- the late imperial in the Central, and Mekong Delta river started from Central throughout the South. (Nahi 2008.) Being influenced strongly by the ancient Chinese, stir-frying, wok, chopsticks, noodles appeared in the north-where people could eat noodle soups three times per day and still found it normal, and vegetables were not used much because of the limitation of climates and soils (Newman 2007).

During special occasions, rich families would decide whether they should go with Vietnamese food or Cantonese food to host the guests. In the Central part, royal traditions were kept and shown by plating many dishes in one meal, each plate could not contain too much food, the presentation was carefully paid attention on to as well as dining rules. Even for the poor families, they still had the needs to have many small dishes in a meal, even if they were all vegetables (Royal Heritage Cruise).

These rules and requirements still exist until today. In addition, fish sauce and dried fish, seafood were the core food options (Mam Com Viet 2017). Even though there was the long coast which could provide fish and seafood throughout the year, however the

weather was a limitation. The fishermen could only go sailing a few months in a year when the ocean was quiet and peaceful. Drying the fish and seafood, making fish sauce from marinated anchovies, pickled vegetables were the only options to survive long, heavy storm months. (Phi Tuyet 2016.)

The South area stood out, being the richest, most attractive land thanks to the Mekong Delta river-which carried heavy sum of alluvium- a key role in enriching crops and providing various kinds of fruits, vegetables and herbs. Black pepper was replaced by hot Chilean chili, exotic fruits appeared in many savoury dishes (grapefruit salad with shrimps). Fresh mints, cilantro, lemongrass, shallots etc. were used frequently. Stir-frying was not a popular option, and simmering was preferable than deep-frying (Royal Heritage Cruise). When there was an occasion to celebrate, the host would decide between the Vietnamese menu or the Western menu. Most of the time they would go with the Western one as they thought it sounded fancier and it was a clever way to show off their wealth to others (Dat Viet 2012).

#### **4.2 Street food culture**

Proper restaurants such as A la Carte have just appeared recently in Vietnam, let alone fine dining ones. Vietnamese natives have a huge passion for street food because of its convenience and cultural value. Unlike Western countries, the popular transportations in Vietnam are cycles and motor bikes, which you can stop anytime, anywhere for a quick breakfast or a late supper in any corner of the city. And because not many people could afford to rent a property for dining, having a small set of equipment and such as pots, spoons, few bowls, chopsticks would be enough for them to carry the food from one place to another. There was one specific set of street vendor which has been used during the first days of street food culture until now (see Appendix 4). (Dunn 14 November 2011.)

However, the street food culture was very different between the three principal areas on the first days of the country's history. While the North didn't enjoy the idea of street food much because they considered street food only for people who did not have time to cook and who had money to spend. They still preferred their meals at home three times a day which could save money and time, the Central offered small street food options such as sweet desserts, grilled corns etc. rather than a bowl of soup, the South's street food culture has developed rapidly. Almost any type of cuisine can be served as street food, even grilled king prawns, all you had to do was sit at home and wait if the street food vendor would pass by your neighbourhood or not. (Tiin 2014.)

The idea of street food has been changing rapidly. Ancient Vietnamese used to live in very small villages and their life was wrapped up with journeys of going to work in the field

or trade goods at the markets and back at home. Together with the existence of the French colonist in Vietnam, roads were built, proper designed houses appeared, people learned more about all the comforts they had never heard of before. Many of French architectures' marks are still visible these days in Vietnam (Alpha history 2016). People started to have more ways of earning incomes, or as some might say- a modern life. The teenage boys became busboys for the French families, women started to learn how to cook different dishes for their masters, grown up men worked as gardeners, chauffeurs etc. People started to get busier and of course, earned more income, therefore home cooking is not an ideal way anymore. (Nguoi Noi Tieng 2015.) And the street food seller who used to carry the whole vendor from place to place also felt tired of it, instead, they would pick a corner that they think there was a lot of passers-by, setting up their vendor with a few, basic small tables and chairs (or even no tables) and served the food. Nowadays, there are specific areas where food vendors sellers can rent and set up for the permanent business location. (Gia 2017.)

In this day, everything still follows the same circumstance. Even though the numbers of higher class restaurants increase rapidly, street food vendors still exist almost everywhere. There are seven reasons why street food still plays a substantial role in every Vietnamese life, of which the author finds very closely connected to:

- It's great value.
- It's absolute delicious.
- It's adventurous.
- It's atmospheric.
- It's authentic.
- It's fresh.
- It's the local way.

(Vespa Adventures)

The street vendor eateries are more popular in the South rather than in the North, mostly because of the weather, and cultural element, too. The eating out habit is very common in Vietnam, especially in big cities (Davis 2017). We were growing up with the image of small but lovable food vendors permeate all around us, with the image of people sitting together enjoying the meals under the sun while watching scooters and bicycles passing by. Many food vendor sellers would even remember their customers by face, knowing their likes and dislikes, offered exactly what they need in their food. Not only until the author left Vietnam to Finland did she recognize how much she missed the atmosphere, the smells, the people etc. In other words, this is described as cultural identity, which reflects in religious belief and ethnic behaviours and holds such a special worth to every person (Kittler et al. 2012, 4). And the images of the vendor carriers, the small chairs, the special advertising

method of the sellers (melody announcements) all contribute to the street food culture of Vietnam (Spinks 2015).

### **4.3 Spices and herbs**

Spice is described as any dried part of a plant, excluded the leaves and is used for seasoning and flavouring a recipe, but not considered as a main ingredient. Even though spices don't rot or spoil, it is still recommended to change after six months of using, and whole dry spices can be kept up to two years if stored well. (Alfaro 2017.)

As mentioned earlier, three main parts of the country were influenced by distinct cultural perspective. While the North was under the control of Chinese for a lengthy period, therefore spices such as black cardamom, black pepper, ginger, cinnamon, galangal, mugwort, turmeric, dill, chili, lemongrass, cha pu leaves, lime leaves etc. The list is shortening toward the Central and the South where spices used mostly are ginger, pepper, chili, lemongrass, lime leaves, turmeric but the use of herbs increases. (Tran 2014.)

Unlike the Northern area, the Central and the South are very generous in using herbs for daily cooking. This can be explained by the fact that the Northern is affected by the coldness which already arrives during autumn, when it is very windy, wet and high humidity and the ability of growing herbs is quite limited. It happens so that the weather changes rapidly frequently, it can be warm today and the next day is freezing, making it challenging for the farmers to decide what type of vegetables and herbs they can grow. Even though there are herbs can survive the winter, it is still risky to choose it as the main source for earning incomes. Most of the Northern farmers will choose vegetables such as courgette, okra, eggplant, kohlrabi, pumpkin, Malabar spinach, bitter melon etc. Lettuces and herbs can be grown in a limited area for extra earning, for example dill, basil, houttuynia, chili, coriander etc. (Thap Rau 2016.)

In contrast of the North, the Central and the South are blessed by the variety of herbs. In addition, uses of forest leaves are very common in these two areas, too. From the popular, daily use herbs such as mint, basil, laksa leaf, saw leaf, balm leaf, oregano, coriander, centella, sage that we can find easily in the market. (Am thuc Viet Nam 2015.) to special types such as cynometra, leaf of ambarella, spike garlic vegetables etc. which can only be found occasionally (Bao Moi 2015).

The image (see Appendix 3) presents a very popular street food pancake (like crepe or Okonomiyaki in Japan), but with thinner paste and filling with bean sprout, shrimps, green beans and pork slices. The pancake can be either smaller made in the Central and wider

in the South, they still have similar herbs and vegetables served with it. Generally, there are about nine types such as basil, mints, laksa leaves, houttuynia, mustard cabbages, green leaves of guava, endive, perilla, savory leaves. It is very common that vegetables and herbs are included in both daily home meals or street food cuisines not only to bring out more colours but to boost the overall flavour of the platter. (Ta 2016.)

#### **4.4 Various cultural elements**

Agriculture play a remarkable role in Vietnamese' culture. The dominant and crop's preferable choice is rice, which can be used also for making noodle, flours and wine (Van Esterik 2008, 19). The most well-liked rice is the aromatic jasmine rice. Soy products are also preferred. The original soy sauce has been used in China for more than 2500 years, and when it arrived in Vietnam, there had been some improvements in the varieties of soy products. For example, the north Vietnamese created the Tuong Ban- a type of thick soy sauce which made by different beans: black bean, yellow bean, green bean but the most popular one was green bean, where it was mixed with rice, salt and was fermented for at least a week before use as a side dish with vegetables. (Am Thuc 365 2011.)

The Central and the South prefer fish sauce and fermented fish products. "The fish are salted, dried, pounded and packed with toasted rice and rice husk in jars for a month or more" (Van Esterik 2008, 25). This is a basic ingredient and used in everyday life. Likely, anchovies are the best option to make the sauce. If the fish are not meant to be made to a sauce, it can be dried under direct sun for at least a day and stored for later use. (Hung 2014.)

Vietnamese like to use fresh ingredients rather dry one, especially vegetables and seasoning products. In addition, the people very believe in the balance of five tastes: sweet, sour, spicy, bitter, salty. The yin and yang concept also should be followed because they believe that by eating properly, you can maintain your health and prevent any sickness. A meal should be evaluated by five senses:

- By sight: presentations, colour of the ingredients.
- By smell: the aromas of the food.
- By hearing: the sound of the ingredients, can be the crispiness or the crunch.
- By taste: the taste when all ingredients combine.
- By touch: the softness or ingredients' leathery.

(Nguoi Lao Dong 2016)

Moreover, in a Vietnamese meal, there are quite many rules that must be followed. In contrast of the West side, a Vietnamese family means the children, the parents and the grandparents all live together in the same residence. Family meals are very important,

and all family members must be present at least for dinner. The meals start with the younger members saying greetings to the older, and only the oldest members allow to touch the food first. The food is served in big plates, placed in the middle of the dining table and everyone can eat as their will. Usually, the best part of the meals would be reserved for the grandparents or toddlers. The mothers always sit close to the rice bowl so that she can fill up the rice for other family members. (Huynh 2017.) Chopsticks are used more frequently in the North while the South prefers spoons during the meals. Eating by fingers is not a popular option, unless the meals contain much finger food or pancakes types. (Vietnamese Food 2013.)

Even though there are 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, and every group has their own cultural value, in this report we mainly focus on the largest ethnic group: the Kinh (87% of the population). The official language also used by this ethnic group while other minor groups may have their own languages, but most of them live deeply in the forest or rural areas and agriculture is their only source for living. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016.) The Kinh natives make the core decisions in the food culture habits. The Northern cuisine's flavour is quite light, not too sour or too sweet, and the use of fish sauce and thicken soy sauce is very well-known. The Central cuisine is stronger in the taste. Food is preferred to be salty and spicy, and fish sauce as well as fermented fish products are very popular. Colours of the ingredients should be shown clearly, and because it is under the influence of the royal tradition, presentation is well considered when serving food. (Vietnam Beauty 2008.) The youngest area- The Southern cuisine, with the influence of Chinese, Thai, Champa and French cultures is rather sweet and spicy, and rare ingredients are also used, such as river snakes, larvae coconut worm, toad, insects etc. (Nguoi Lao Dong 2016.)



#### 4.5 Potential customers in the capital areas

Table 1. European tourists in Vietnam up to 09/2017 (Vietnam Tourism 2017)

	Estimated 9/2017	01.01.201 7- 01.9.2017	Compare to 8/2017	Compare to 9/2016	Com- pare to 2016
<b>Total</b>	<b>975.952</b>	<b>9.448.331</b>	<b>79,4</b>	<b>118,6</b>	<b>128,4</b>
<b>Europe</b>	<b>115.634</b>	<b>1.394.630</b>	<b>70,4</b>	<b>105,7</b>	<b>119,0</b>
Russia	36.196	420.635	99,8	108,0	140,6
Spain	8.054	51.337	57,1	122,7	121,7
Sweden	1.219	33.599	78,0	98,8	118,1
Finland	528	13.453	117,6	98,1	114,4
Germany	12.317	143.693	74,2	100,7	114,4
Holland	4.319	54.935	40,4	101,4	113,5
Italy	3.782	43.372	46,0	113,0	113,2
UK	18.707	213.074	67,7	109,7	112,2
Denmark	1.525	27.188	73,1	116,9	112,2
Belgium	2.175	21.744	77,8	113,1	112,0
France	13.214	193.212	51,5	97,7	107,6
Norway	899	19.150	61,0	92,8	105,6
Switzerland	1.410	23.997	58,4	97,6	105,3
Other European coun- tries	11.289	135.241	78,9	98,0	109,3

Comparing to other Nordic countries: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the number of Finnish tourists is quite low. Since 2015, the Vietnam Customs Department have approved the rule of allowing Finnish citizens to enter the country without visa if the extend of the trip is not over 15 days, alongside with other Nordic countries (Ministry of Immigration 2015.). The idea is to attract more tourists from the Northern Europe countries. As a result, the number of Nordic tourists increased rapidly, especially from Sweden (33 599 turns).

According to the figure, the number of Finnish tourists travel to Vietnam since the beginning of 2017 up to September of the same year has been 13453 turns, 17,6%

more than August 2016. This is a good sign to show that there are more Finnish citizens who are interested in learning about Vietnam and want to explore the countries. Up until seven years ago when the author first arrived in Finland, not many people knew what country was Vietnam nor where it was, some even misunderstood that the Vietnam war was still going on. Given that the number of Vietnamese natives in Finland were not as high as other nationalities, it was understandable for Finnish for the lack acknowledgment about Vietnam.

In 2013, the Finland's national airline company Finnair operated their flight routine to Hanoi- the capital of Vietnam. The period started from June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013 and ended on October 27<sup>th</sup>, with three frequencies flight per week. (Finnair 2012.) Since 2015, the largest city of Vietnam- Ho Chi Minh city (former name Saigon) had also attracted Finnair and became their new winter holiday destination. Finnair operated direct flight to Ho Chi Minh city once a week for the period December-March (World Airline News 2014).

The business partner of Finnair- Aurinkomatkat also took their opportunity in creating unique package tours to Vietnam, mainly to various islands and attractive, historical destinations and largest cities. The average package tour starts from 895€/ week and it targets those customers who seek for a getaway from the cold, dark winter in Finland (Aurinkomatkat 2017). The weather condition in Vietnam is extremely ideal (avr.30<sup>o</sup> in the Central to South), with long coast from North toward South and the currency difference is also a bonus for travellers to Vietnam (1€ equals 26641 dongs) (Vietcombank 2017).

## **5 Research methodology and implementation**

In this chapter, we discuss about the research methods used for the thesis, which are quantitative method and benchmarking. The research process is also conducted from forming the survey to collecting the data and analysis process. In addition, the limitations, validity and reliability are also discussed here.

### **5.1 Quantitative research method**

Survey research is verified as an effective measurement method to gather information from different people within various fields and positions (Ruel, Wagner & Gillespie 2016, 2). Some people may question the reason of conducting research and its efficiency after the graduation, however, it is proven that together with the knowledge learnt from lectures, students can apply it into practice by using theories, resources and ethical matters collected from the conducted research. (Altinay, Paraskevas & Jang 2016, 4).

Since the purpose of the thesis is to gather as many responses as possible, a quantitative survey was created and used. Quantitative research is used to review what many individuals think towards one specific point (Altinay et al. 2016, 93). In addition, quantitative research method is proven to be a powerful tool to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours from a vast sample of population, using generating numeric data and data which can be converted to valuable statistics (DeFranzo 2011).

The survey was created to be answered anonymously with 15 questions and took five to seven minutes to answer. It included opposed question formats such as rating/scales, close, and open-response. There were also elements of qualitative research used to portray the selected population's experiences, emotions and expectations. (Altinay et al. 2016, 93–155.) 6/15 questions were optional, such as occupational backgrounds, special diets, personal travel movements to Vietnam and the journeys' companions. The respondents could also leave free comments about what they thought towards the discussed topic as well as suggestions and orientations. The reason why almost half of the research questions were not compulsory was because the thesis' topic was rarely new in Finland, therefore if all the questions were mandatory, it might have brought strained feelings to the respondents which could lead to counterfeit results.

### **5.2 Benchmarking**

Benchmarking is described as “a systematic procedure or comparative management with the objective to achieve continuous improvement. The great success of benchmarking in

recent years is probably related to its inherent characteristic of being a knowledge-sharing and motivational process". (Wober 2002, 2.)

Wober introduced two different types of benchmarking, which are internal and external (Wober 2002,2). For the purpose of this thesis, external benchmarking is used to learn about other competitors, to get the closer ideas of their performances and why they are successful. Generally, benchmarking includes four elements:

- Strategic benchmarking.
- Product benchmarking.
- Process benchmarking.
- Competence benchmarking.

The ideal is to learn about the plans of other competitors, what products/services they are constructing, how they are processing and competent factors so that we can apply it practically and effectively. (Tuominen, Niva & Malmberg 2011, 12–15.)

John Reh- a senior business executive, in his latest article published in 2017 has a simple explanation towards benchmarking. He explains that benchmarking is the stage where we compare ourselves to other organizations within the same industry or in a broader market-place level, whether it is a product, service or process etc. During his experienced working years, he sums up with the main points that should be included in benchmarking initiative method:

- Measure of time.
- Quality.
- Cost and effectiveness.
- Customer satisfaction.

(Reh 2017)

There are clearly some slight differences in benchmarking definitions and how to apply benchmarking to practice between Wober and Reh. While Wober focuses on building the framework quite heavily on theoretical standard, Reh provides a much simpler description which reflects what various organizations should focus on when planning for benchmarking practice.

Even though the number of so-called Vietnamese restaurants in Finland is not small-22 restaurants (TripAdvisor). However, many of them only provide a few options of Vietnamese food beside other Asian food options. The author wants to focus on the restaurants that truly provide authentic, original Vietnamese flavour in the capital area.

### **5.3 Potentials, limitations and reliabilities**

The preliminary survey was created on 11.09.2017 and sent out after a week through various social media channels such as author's personal Facebook, Haaga-Helia Pasila campus (unofficial) and Finland IEASF (a public Facebook channel for English speakers in Finland). The target group focuses on people who live mainly in the capital area (Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa). During the survey process, minor fixes were made to assist the respondents to receive the legitimate results. After nine days, the survey was completed with a total 131 responses.

The potential of the thesis is that the topic is rather new in the Finnish culinary industry, therefore the chance of attracting various respondents from different fields and backgrounds is extreme. In addition, the available suggestions and comments collected from the survey can make the thesis' idea more realistic and viable. However, the possibility of non-response is also present, because of the discussed topic. If the survey receives a low response rate, it may harm the credibility of the outcome because it cannot be used to represent the overall target group (Altinay et al. 2016, 126).

Furthermore, the time to respond to the survey being limited to over a week from launching to collecting the data narrowed down the amount of potential responses. The autumn seemed to be a busy season for many respondents, therefore, it took much longer time to reach them and gaining their answers. Luckily, the reliability of the survey was surprisingly good since there was only one respondent (out of 131) who provided false information on the nationality but nothing else.

## 6 Research results analysis

This chapter is the conclusion of the survey process and the benchmarking in practice. In addition, a few qualitative research results were included based on respondents' suggestions and comments. A primary draft was also presented for a potential South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland based on the collected data from the survey and the benchmarking comparison.

### 6.1 Demographic responses

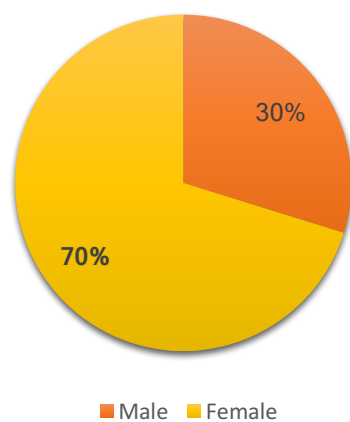


Figure 4. Proportion of gender (N=131)

Figure 4 demonstrates the proportion of all responders' genders. The difference between male and female responders is significant. Out of 131 responders, there are 91 females who answered the survey, which values 70%. There are only 40 male responders who account for 30%.

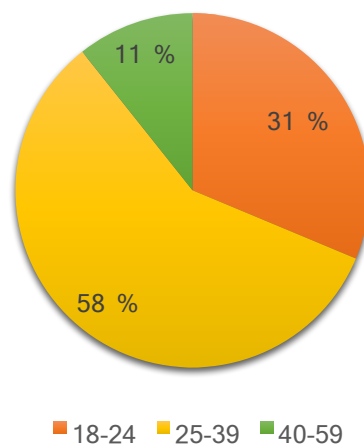


Figure 5. Respondents' age (N=131)

The ages of respondents are shown in Figure 5. There is no respondent under 18 and above 59. There are 11% of respondents between 40 to 59 years old. The other 31% are from 18 to 24 and 58% are from 25 to 39 years old. Almost 89% of all respondents are from 18 to 39 years old- who are rather young and could be partially considered as the main target group that either has had experience with the cuisine or interest in having the new South Vietnamese cuisine kitchen in Finland.

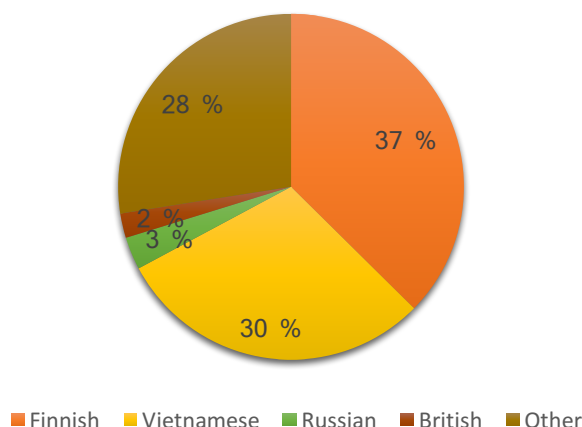


Figure 6. Nationalities of respondents (N=129)

There are two respondents refused to provide the information of their nationalities. Finnish citizens hold 37%, which equals to 49 people. There are 39 Vietnamese which accounts for 30% of the nationalities. Russian are the third largest group with four people, accounts for 3%. The British represents the 2%, equals to three people. The rest of the nationalities are New Zealand, Nepal, Australia, Ukraine, South Africa, United States, Brazil, Italy, Egypt, China, Mauritania, Mexico, Serbia, Scotland, Ireland, Indonesia, Australia, Germany, Turkey, India. Each of these nationalities has only one or two people per country. There is one person who give false information about the nationality, while one person only states as Asian for this question.

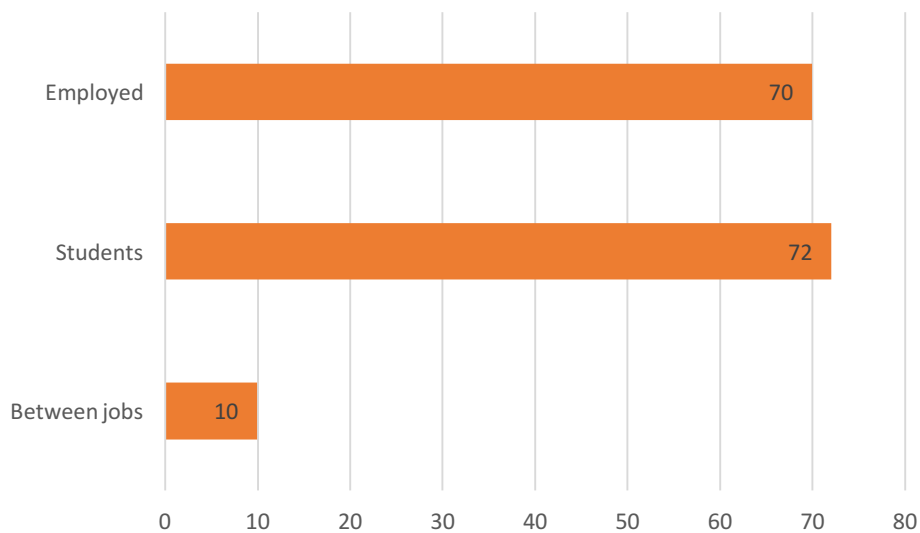


Figure 7. Respondents' Occupation (N=131)

All respondents participated in this question. 72 people said that they are studying. The other 70 mentioned they were employed by the time being asked and only ten people claimed that they were seeking for jobs. The question allows all participants to choose more than one question because it is very common for people to have jobs while still be in school.

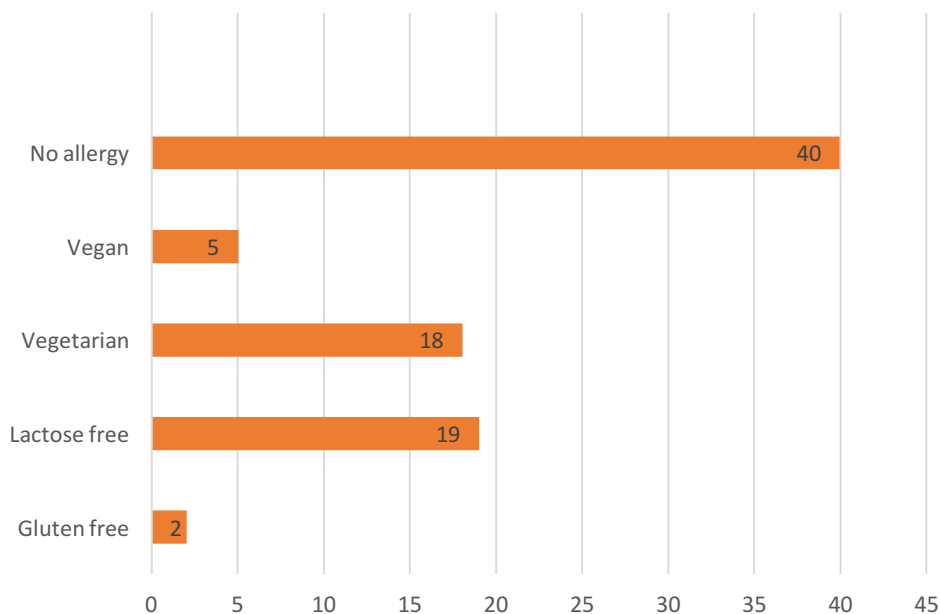


Figure 8. Special allergies and diets provided by respondents (N=97)

97 was the number of responses received from this question. Almost half of the participants said they had no allergy (40 people). Lactose free is the second largest number came up with 19 people claimed they had. 18 people said they were vegetarian. There were only five vegan in the list and the gluten free group was the smallest with two



people. Respondents could leave comments if they had other allergies besides the mentions one, in which two people said they had none and one person said shellfish was the harmful allergy for their health.

## 6.2 Experiences and expectations

To understand if the respondents are familiar with the country and the cuisine, the next question in the survey asked if the respondents had ever been to Vietnam, which 129 answers were collected and shown as in figure . There is also an open- text answer, in which they can fill in if how many times they have been there.

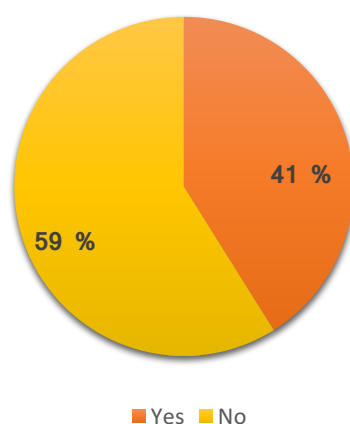


Figure 9. The respondents' travel movement to Vietnam (N=131)

There were 77 people said that they were either from Vietnam or had travelled to Vietnam minimum one time. The rest 54 people which accounts for 41% claimed that they had never been to Vietnam, but at least had heard about it.

The following question was an optional one, and only targeted for those had been to Vietnam to help understanding the purpose of the trip. It only applied for those who had chosen the “Yes” answer for the previous question. There were only 64 respondents who provided their answers for this question. And the result is shown below in Figure 10.

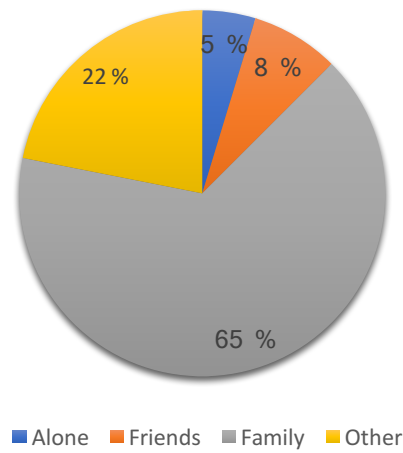


Figure 10. Respondents' travel companies to Vietnam (N=131)

There were 41 people said they came to Vietnam with family, which accounts for 65%. 14 people chose "Other" as their reason for the trip, which played 22%. About 8% of the respondents, equals to 5 people said they had their friends joined together.

The respondents were given the option of open answer if their purpose to come to Vietnam was different than the options provided, there were eight people said that they had never been there, one person claimed that he/she lived there, and another one person said business was the reason of the trip. The rest 5% of the total, equals to three people chose "Alone" as their answers.

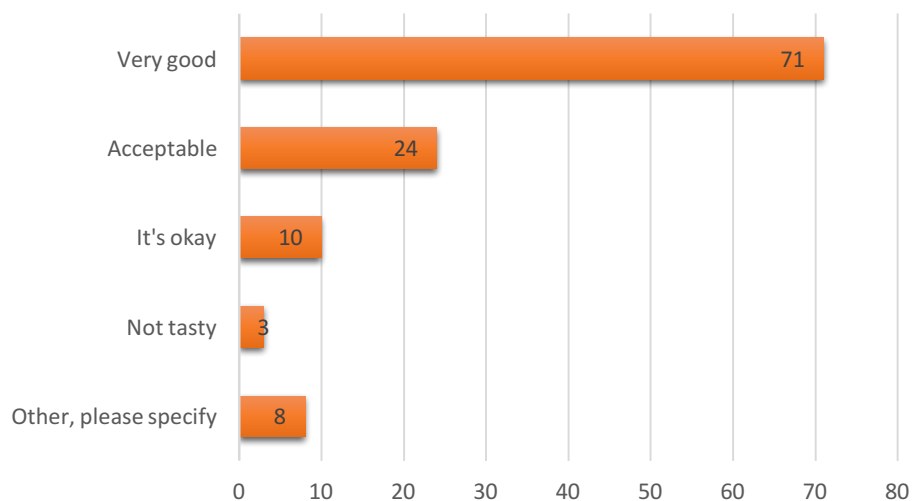


Figure 11. Respondents' impression of the cuisine (N=108)

There were 108 answers were given in total to get the understanding of how people felt about the cuisine in general. 71 people thought that the food was very good, which was also the most chosen answer for this question. The second most answer was that the food

was acceptable, of which 24 people chose. There were ten people who gave the impression that the food was just okay, at least of what they had tasted about Vietnamese food in Finland. It is understandable that there is no flavour which can satisfy all types of customers, that was the reason why three people chose to answer that the food was not tasty at all. There were also a few free comments left for this question, of which one person who said that the food was very good said that because it was home cook. One other said that he had no interest in the food and never would have the intention to try it. Also belonged in the comment box said one person that he had no clear feeling about the taste of Vietnamese food while the last comment claimed that he never had a chance to taste the cuisine by all means but he really looked forward to.

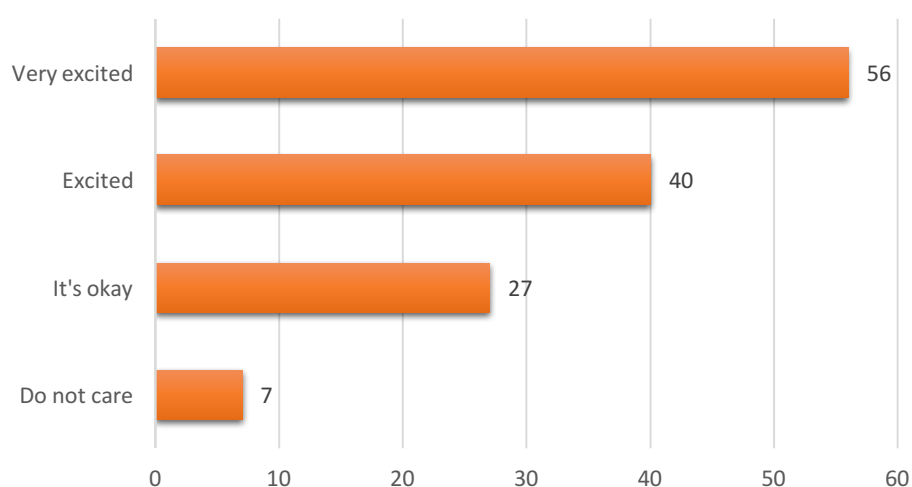


Figure 12. Respondents' reaction towards a new South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland (N=130)

The respondents moved on to provide their personal opinions about whether there should be a South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland, especially in the capital area. 56 people said they felt very excited about having one, 40 people followed with quite similar thinking that it was an exciting idea. There were 27 people who were neither excited nor against the new style of cuisine, while the rest seven people said they had no knowledge if there was one South Vietnamese kitchen established in Finland, and having it here would not be their concern.

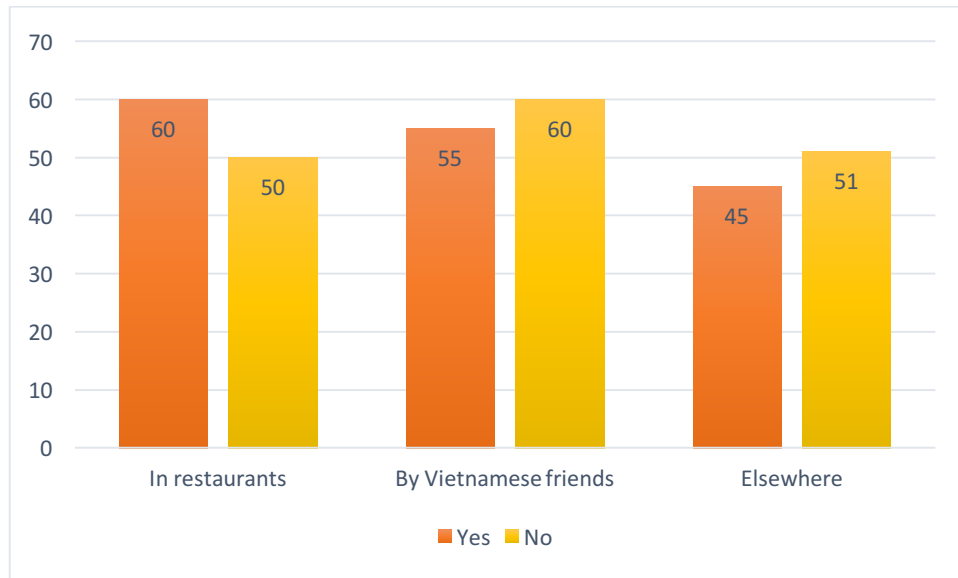


Figure 13. Channels from which respondents taste the Vietnamese cuisine in Finland (N=340)

This question was to dig a little bit deeper for the experience of the respondents in under what circumstances did they try the Vietnamese food, and whereas they recognized the differences between Southern and Northern Vietnamese cuisine. A brief description about the flavours and presentation were given along with this question, helping the respondents to understand the question clearly. Also, they were allowed to choose more than one answer or open answer as they wished.

There was an overlap when respondents supposed to select one answer only, however, many of them decided to go for more than one response. 60 people said they knew and had tasted the Vietnamese food by visiting restaurants in Finland, while the other 60 said they had Vietnamese friends cooked the food for them. 51 was the number of people who enjoyed the food somewhere else, which Germany, Vietnam, United States and France were in the list.

For those who chose No as their answers, the numbers were quite similar. 50 people claimed they had never been to any Vietnamese restaurant. Another 60 respondents said they never had the food offered by any Vietnamese nationals while 51 people said they never knew and tasted the food anywhere at all.

### 6.3 Pricing and style

Setting suitable prices for a restaurant's menu is always an important job and it needs careful research and evaluation. In addition, each restaurant would have a specific path of

serving style which they aim to follow to differ themselves from others. Therefore, the survey includes research questions about prices of portions, serving styles and ingredients' costs.

Table 2. Respondents' recommended price (N=130)

	7	8-13	14-19	20-25	>25	Average
Starters	82 %	17 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	1.18
Main courses	4 %	60 %	31 %	5 %	0 %	2.38
Desserts	80 %	19 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	1.21
Tasting menu	20 %	23 %	15 %	23 %	19 %	2,97
Snacks	92 %	7 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	1.09
Drinks	91 %	9 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	1.01
<b>Total</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1,65</b>

Table 2 illustrates how the respondents thought towards the price of portions. The most suggested prices are marked as yellow. For starters, 82% believed that 7€ would be suitable enough to ask for from the customers' point of view. Main courses could be a little bit higher, within the range of 8€-13€. About 80% people chose that the dessert's price could not extend the number of 7€. The idea of tasting menu was also brought in to evaluate how much would the people be willing to pay for, which they claimed that both 8€-13€ and 20€-25€ (both took up 23% of the answers) were ideal price to list in the menu. Because South Vietnamese cuisine offers various snacks option, it was also included in the study with 92% of all respondents though 7€ was the maximum they would pay for. Drinks' price received similar thought from 91% of all the answers.

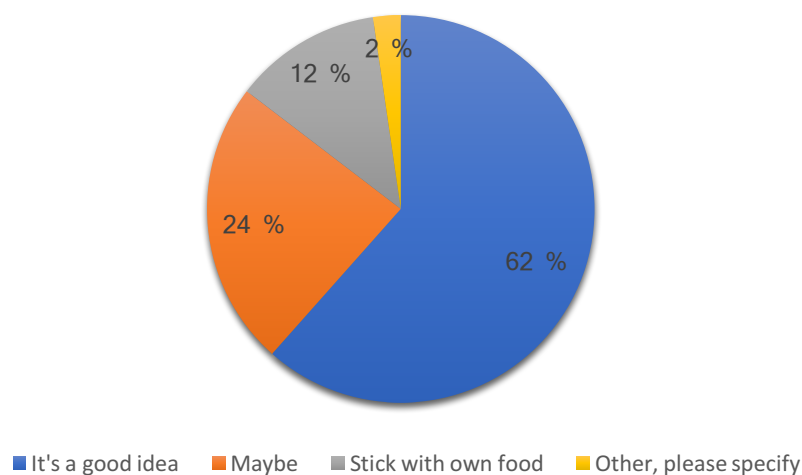


Figure 14. Respondents' opinion about food sharing (N=130)

Each restaurant choose which style they will follow. It varies from fine dining, A la Carte to food sharing. Because Vietnamese cuisine is usually served in shared portions, it is necessary to evaluate how people think towards this specific style of dining. A total 130 people gave their answers, in which 62% of the respondents felt optimistic about having their meals shared with someone, 24% still hesitated with the idea as they chose to answer as “ Maybe”. A few people were againsted the idea and preferred having the food served only to themselves. The chance to leave free comment was available, therefore 2% of the people selected with their own opinion, which in this case accounts for one person said it depended on who they were with when dining, but as they lived in Western countries, they thought sharing the food would not become a suitable fit based on the culture.

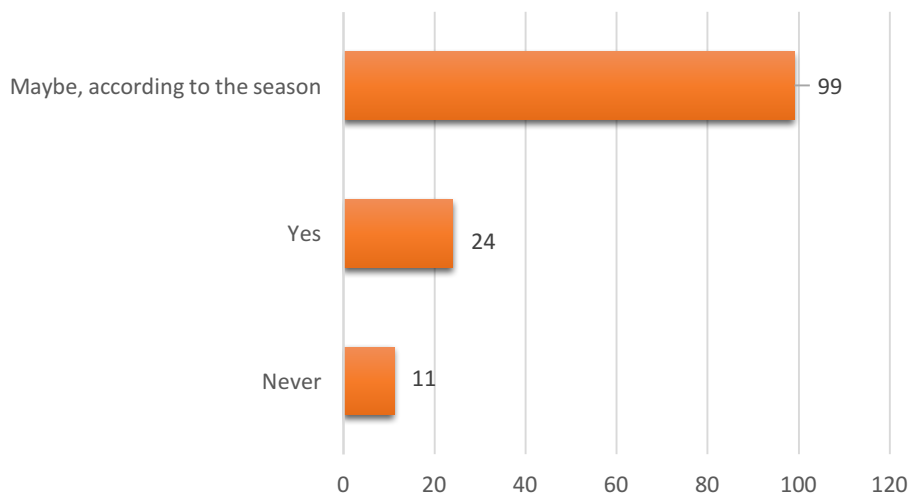


Figure 15. How flexibility the price can change under different circumstances (N=130)

Establishing a South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland may bring many difficulties because not all ingredients are available in stores or the price to purchase them is extraordinary. In special cases, price can be changed according to the seasons and whether the customers are happy with that change or not, a question was provided for further information. A number of 130 people answered with the option of more than one answers, which resulted in 134 collected responses in total. There were 99 people said that they did not agree 100% with the idea, but changing the price based on the seasons change was fine for them occasionally. Other 24 people said that it would not affect them if the price raised a little bit, and the rest 11 people said that the business should always have fixed prices and no changes in price should be allowed.

#### **6.4 Other comments, feedbacks**

Respondents were given the chance to leave their free comments or feedback about the Vietnamese cuisine already existing in Finland as well as further suggestions towards the discussed topic. There were 99 people who contributed their personal thoughts about the Vietnamese food they had tasted in Finland. Most of the responses pointed out that they thought the food was averagely good, some dishes were bland and tasteless. In addition, the ingredients and flavours were quite poor in selections. Negative comments were mostly from people who were originally from Vietnam, some minor comments compared the flavours to other locations where they had travelled to, which included United States, Germany and France, where the population of Vietnamese was much greater.

The authenticity of the cuisine was mentioned many times. In addition, particular meal options were suggested to be added more, such as vegetarian and allergy-related specialties. There were three respondents claimed they were not even aware of the existence of Vietnamese cuisine in Finland. Many people suggested that it was understandable that the flavours must be changed slightly to reach Finnish's need, however, the overall taste should be kept identifying the cuisine clearly and supporting the development of the Vietnamese culinary journey in Finland.

At last, another 31 respondents provided the general feedbacks towards all survey questions. There were two people that pointed out what they thought must be difficulties in establishing a South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland, which included the purchase of ingredients and high rental. Many of them shared the same ideas that they loved the concept of sharing the food, as long as the vegan and vegetarian options were also available and be kept away from the other usual ones. In addition, as the rise of bistro and street food vendors were increasing in Finland, to compete with them the price should not be too high to afford. They were willing to pay more for some specific dishes, but for the long run they found it hard to return to an overpriced restaurant.

#### **6.5 Benchmarking against Vietnamese restaurants in Nordic countries**

The mentioned restaurants in the benchmarking table (see Appendix 5) are the ones which the author had chosen for comparison between the Nordic countries and had a chance to visit 5/6 (exclude the restaurant located in Norway). While the Taste of Vietnam restaurant in Stockholm had a strong Chinese influence in their atmosphere and decoration, they still can deliver the authentic flavour of Vietnamese food. The Pho 17, Viet's top restaurants are quite similar with their basic set up and cosiness, the Onam restaurant is the only one which truly brings us back to Vietnam. They are very delicate in every single detail, the cutlery holders, the hanging pictures on the wall etc. All three restaurants locate

in the metropolitan area, either in shopping mall or very close to train station, which is very easy to access. The price range is quite the same compared to each other, with main course usually from 10€-17€, an average price compares to other restaurants in the neighbourhood. They are all family business and run with a whole team of Vietnamese staffs.

The LeLe restaurant offers modern, fusion Vietnamese restaurant and strongly Southern flavour. It can be explained by the origin of the owners. They all came to Denmark as boat refugee around 1979. From a small snack bar in Northern Jutland, they quickly expanded their business to a restaurant, and street food truck soon came along as well as other high-class restaurants. (LeLe). The atmosphere in LeLe restaurant is quite similar to most high standard restaurants in Scandinavia. They all have Western architecture design with elegant colour pattern. The services also follow strict Western style as well as kitchen design.

The last restaurant in the table is Xich Lo, locates in Oslo, Norway. Unfortunately, there was no chance to visit the restaurant, so all the observation has to be done through the restaurant's business website. The price is quite high compare to other restaurants in Finland, but because Norway is known as an expensive country so maybe the price range is average for the locals.

LeLe restaurant and Xich Lo restaurant shared the same fact that they were the two oldest restaurants mentioned in the table, the Stockholm restaurant only opened their door firstly in 2013 and the Vietnamese cuisine-only restaurants in Finland were only appeared until after 2015. O Nam is the only restaurant in the benchmarking table which delivers strong Northern Vietnam flavour while the others are more focused on the South. The Taste of Vietnam restaurant was very delicate in providing matched herbs to go with specific dishes while the LeLe restaurant brought more Western twists in their food and atmosphere.

## **6.6 Potential Southern- Vietnamese kitchen in the capital area**

After collecting the survey data and evaluating all relevant suggestions based on respondents' experiences, together with the studying about food trends in Finland, it is positive to say that there is a potential to establish a South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland, firstly in the capital area (Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa)- where locates large number of the population.



The kitchen should be formed as bistro or cafeteria style, with open-air atmosphere where people can relax while enjoying the tasty food. Traditional, well-known dishes should be kept as they are so familiar with amongst most of the customers: Pho- noodle soup, spring roll, summer roll but new values should be brought in to satisfy customers' culinary adventure. It is recommended to have the menu changed occasionally to attract people, and the options of modern trends such as vegan, vegetarian and diet-related must be expanded.

Sharing the food is an advisable suggestion to bring people closer and enjoy the dining time together but the Western style of dining should be available too. There should be other options for those who like to stick with their own dishes, too. The price range is average compared to other similar businesses, which from 7€-13€ for either starters, main courses and desserts. Tasting menu is not included in the business framework while traditional Vietnamese drinks and snacks are highly presented to meet customers' need, with the price is not more than 7€/portion.

## 7 Conclusion

This chapter generalizes all the findings towards the research questions because they are the essential purpose for this thesis to be conducted. All relevant issues are also included. The suggestions and recommendations received from the survey's respondents provide clear guidance of what should be done. The author's learning purpose is discussed to provide more knowledge to not only serve the thesis process but also for the future career path.

### 7.1 Research questions

**“What are the current food trends in Finland?”**

**Where is Vietnamese cuisine in the gastronomy map in Finland and its future?”**

After the period of studying and evaluating all principles related to the food trends in Finland, it is clear to say that the existence of international cuisines is more popular at the moment, especially in the metropolitan area. In addition, the customers' lifestyles and expectations are also changing. Therefore, a South Vietnamese kitchen which established in Finland may hold many capabilities with it. However, it also carries a few entanglements which needed to be solved.

To begin with, the knowledge of the customers towards the Vietnamese cuisine in general is very limited, let alone the South Vietnamese flavours. More often, when discussing about Asian culinary in Finland, China is considered the most well-known country, and Thailand is the next in line. This can be explained from the population of Vietnamese in Finland is rather small compare to others. Moreover, the number of tourists come to Vietnam and experiment the local cuisine is still small, it is clear to pronounce that Vietnamese food is currently a haziness.

The past few years we have witnessed many rapid changes towards Finnish behaviours when talking about food and beverages experiences. It is clear to see people with different backgrounds blend in the same dining hall, either high class restaurants or an outdoor bistro. In addition, people tend to seek for new inspiring adventures. Food can be ordered to people's doors simply by using phone applications such as Wolt or Foodora. The demand of having private chefs is also increasing, either at the restaurant or at home. Sustainable values become more important in daily life. Personal well-being is being paid more attention than usual. Ready-meal must be fast to serve but still need to maintain the require nutrition values and restaurant's style. People require to have more selections that can satisfy individual's diets. This even applies to all restaurants where the flexibility and creativity not only can be observed from the menu but also the decorations, personnel and so on.

Moreover, people start to escape their comfort zone and have more desires to try new ethnic cuisines. Vegetables and fresh ingredients attract people often. Seasonal products are preferable as it provides significantly savoury taste. Cooking classes are opened occasionally for those who are interested in learning some more cooking techniques or just for leisure purpose.

At the moment, there are many Asian restaurants which offer a few Vietnamese dishes in their menu, basically the most popular ones such as beef noodle soup, summer rolls, baguettes and so. However, there are only three new restaurant who truly provide Vietnamese-only menu, which are Onam, Viet's top and Pho 17. There are two restaurants located in Helsinki while the last one is in Vantaa. Their general flavours are more North Vietnamese style. Based on the positive feedbacks received and market's evaluation, Vietnamese cuisine can deliver all demanding requires from fresh ingredients, high nutrition value to new ethnic experience. This thesis does not mean to be presumptuous to claim that the South Vietnamese kitchen can be immediately successful but its door to the Finnish gastronomy map is widely open and it surely deserve a stable place.

## **7.2 Suggestions**

Overall flavour, pricing and style play vital role in the succeed of a South Vietnamese kitchen. People tend to go dine with families or friends in a restaurant because they want to feel relaxed while enjoying delicious food. The authenticity of the flavour is mentioned many times as the core value. This may bring some difficulties in the operation of the kitchen. Not all the original ingredients can be found easily from the Asian markets located in the metropolitan area. Some of them are available throughout the year but quite overpriced. Some products are hardly visible in Finland. It means that substitutions are required for specific dishes. People agree to slight change but they do not want to misunderstand the cuisine to other Asian countries. If it meant to be South Vietnamese food, it must not only satisfy the locals but also the Vietnamese who study and live in Finland.

If the products are not available for purchase, changing the menu is needed occasionally. Prices can be changed according to the season but it is not highly recommended. The main target of customers is the young generation in the Helsinki area, the price must not exceed 17€ for all dishes and 7€ for drinks because everyone has a specific budget. The idea of food sharing is brought for examination and received optimistic opinions. This style brings people closer together and provides the ability to taste various kind of food during one meal. Moreover, the general atmosphere must be stood out and tell its story. The traditional set-up and customer service should be avoided because they are outdated

and unattractive, comparing to the new modern fusion restaurants which are on the rise downtown.

### **7.3 Further discussion**

The main goal of the thesis is to judge the viability of a South Vietnamese kitchen and the related interests regarding the specific demands of Finland's culinary market through a theoretical framework. In addition, the background of the discussed cuisine has been examined as it is necessary to understand if it has the potential to reach people's needs, and to what degree. A survey was conducted with 131 respondents from various social media channels providing views toward the mentioned topic. It is optimistic that the door for a new ethnic kitchen is wide open, however, it is also recommended to involve more academic study on the market and financial review. Besides the survey, the benchmarking method was also used to evaluate and compare against other establishments in the same field to see what has driven them to open a Vietnamese kitchen, what they have succeeded and what they have failed to do.

The author admitted that this topic is not entirely the novel idea. After a time of reconsideration, the author chose a different path to approach the subject. The author posits that the readers may find it more interesting to first learn about the cuisine's background and potential customers' knowledge surrounding it, based on the current demands. This also brought some risks and difficulties as many respondents had little to no knowledge of the differences between Vietnamese cuisine and other Asian countries, let alone the regional culinary diversity within Vietnam.

With the collected data from the survey and the study of relevant theories, it has given the author a greater understanding of the Finnish gastronomical market and the potential of a new ethnic experience. It is easy to come up with an idea, but it takes a long journey to turn that dream into a reality. For it to become successful, it requires consciousness of mind and careful evaluation from different angles, especially for a new market such as Finland. If these requirements can be met, Finland can provide ample opportunities for new exotic dining experiences.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Vietnam's highlighted dishes



## Appendix 2. Map of spices and herbs used in Vietnam



### Appendix 3. Traditional pancake



### Appendix 4. Street food vendor carrier





## Appendix 5. Benchmarking Vietnamese restaurants in Nordic countries

Restaurant	Location	Cuisine	Atmosphere	Price	Information
O Nam restaurant Mannerheimintie 14, 00100 Helsinki, Finland	In Forum shopping Mall, Helsinki centre.	Mixed Vietnamese street food style: spring rolls, salads, rice dishes, noodle soups, dessert, Vietnamese coffee.	Authentic street food vendor's decoration.	Lunch: 10€ (specialty: 15€). Dinner: 6,5-16€ Dessert: 7€	Open 2016, strong Northern cuisine taste, family business, banquets service and vegan options included.
Pho 17 Pitäjänmäentie 17, 00370 Helsinki, Finland	20 m from Pitäjänmäki train station, easy access to Leppävaara.	Chinese dim sum, sushi and South Vietnamese food. Drinks are coffee, smoothies and soft drinks.	Simple, basic décor, small dining room (max.21 persons)	Starters: 4,5€-5,9€. Main courses: 6,5€-13,9€.	Open 2017, home cook style, catering service offered, daily offered and weekend specialties.
Viet's top Iskoskuja 3 A 1, 01600 Vantaa, Finland	In Myyrmäki shopping centre, next to Myyrmäki station.	Mixed Vietnamese cuisine, buffet during lunch and weekend (11-15), A la Carte all day. Drinks include soft drinks, beef, coffee.	Bright colour, simple setting, mainly yellow and white.	Starters: 4,5€-6€ Main courses: 10€-17€ Desserts: 7€.	Open 2016, family business, strong Southern flavours, because of the owners' origin. Special discounts for Vietnamese students
LêLê Copenhagen, Denmark LêLê restaurant Vesterbrogade 40 LêLê Street Kitchen	Different locations in Copenhagen city, include popular markets squares.	Fusion Vietnamese street food. Numerous services: A la Carte, tasting menu, bar and food trucks.	Modern, Western architecture with hints of Vietnam culture (lanterns, clay pots etc.)	Starters: 8€-15€ Main courses: 15€-25€. Desserts: 11€ Tasting menu: 48€-65€/person	First kitchen opened in 2003 by 4 siblings of the Lê family. Diverse services: restaurant, street kitchen, food truck, catering. Fusion Vietnamese food with clear Southern flavour.
Taste of Vietnam Folkungagatan 84, 116 22 Stockholm, Sweden	SoFo & Medborgarplatsen neighbourhood: the birthplace of hipsterism, shopping malls and Swedish famous student hall Skparpan.	Classic, authentic Vietnamese cuisine, mixed flavours. Lunch, dinner, children menus, bar& snacks.	Quite old-fashioned design, strongly affected by Chinese culture, and can easily be misunderstood as a Chinese restaurant.	Starters: 6€-9€. Main courses: 15€-19€.	Open in 2013. Family business. The restaurant has vegetarian friendly menu and children menu. The flavour is strongly South Vietnamese, use of fresh herbs is generous.
Xich Lo restaurant Karl Johansgate 23B 0159 Oslo, Norway	Locates on 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor of Eger shopping mall.	Modern, fusion Vietnamese cuisine. A special Asian tapas& bakery style.	Simple but elegant architecture, relaxing atmosphere, Vietnam values are proudly	Starters: 11€-16€. Main courses: 27€-33€. Tasting menu: 61€-77€ Desserts: 14€	Open in 2001 by a Norwegian named Odd Arne Braute. He had visited Vietnam many times and strongly loved



			presented in decoration.		the people and cuisine and wanted to bring it back to Norway.
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## Appendix 6. Questionnaire

### *Thesis survey*

***The goal of this survey is to learn how people feel about Vietnamese food and restaurants in Finland, and if they know the differences between Northern and Southern cuisine, what are their expectations and experiences. The collected answers will help the author to find out if there is a potential of opening a South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland or not.***

1. What is your gender? \*

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

2. Your age? \*

- ☐ <18  
☐ 18-24  
☐ 25-39  
☐ 40-59  
☐ >59

3. Nationality? \*

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4. Are you currently?

- ☐ Students  
☐ Employed  
☐ Between jobs

5. Do you have any allergies or special diets?

You can choose one or more option

- ☐ Gluten free  
☐ Lactose free

☐ Vegetarian

☐ Vegan

☐ Others, please specify:

☐

☐ No allergy

6. Have you ever been to Vietnam? \*

Yes, how many times:

☐

☐ No

7. Who have you been there with?

☐ Alone

☐ Friends

☐ Family

Other, specify:

☐

8. Have you ever tried South Vietnamese food? \*

Differences between North and South: -Northern cuisine (Hanoi): affected mostly by Chinese, uses of root vegetables, noodles, rice, stir-fried styles etc. -Southern cuisine (Ho Chi Minh): street food style, finger food, lots of fresh herbs, garlic, shallots, sweet flavour, with mix of French, Chinese and Indian flavours)

	Yes	No	Yes, but never notice the differences
In restaurant in Finland	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being served by Vietnamese friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Elsewhere</b> , please specify _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. How do you feel about it?

You can choose more than one

☐ Very good

☐ Acceptable

☐ It's okay

☐ Not tasty

☐ Very bad

☐ Other, please specify:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**10. How do you feel about having a South Vietnamese kitchen in Finland? \***

- ☐ Very Excited  
☐ Excited  
☐ It's okay  
☐ Do not care

**11. How do you feel generally about Vietnamese restaurants (either Northern or Southern) in Finland so far?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**12. What do you think would be reasonable price for the Vietnamese food in Finland? \***

Prices are in €.

	<7	8-13	14-19	20-25	>25
Starters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Main courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Desserts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tasting menu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snacks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drinks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**13. Vietnamese food is all about sharing, do you think? \***

- ☐ It's a good idea.  
☐ Maybe.  
☐ No, I want to stick with my own food.

☐ Others, please specify.  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Vietnamese ingredients are not as cheap as other, so prices changes can be done...? \***

- ☐ Yes  
☐ Maybe, according to the seasons

☐ Never

**15.** If you have any comments, please share here:

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